Chair - U.S. Congress DRAWER 27A FURNITURE

Curios and Relics

Furniture

Chairs

U.S. Congress

Excerpts from newspapers and other sources

From the files of the

Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

71.2009 085

Will H. Towles - 4720 South Chelsea Lane - Bethesda, Maryland

November 23rd 43

The Lincoln Life Foundation,
Ft Wayne - Indiana

Gentlemen: I have among my collection a chair that was formally owned by Abraham Lincoln and is the chair he occupied while in Congress.

President Lincoln presented this chair to his friend Mathew Brady, wartime photographer and it was used by Brady in his Photographic Studio until 1903 -

I bought the studio formally owned by Brady, with furnishings and therefore acquired the chair - It was used in my studio from then until 1929 when I retired and have had the chair in my home since -

Will H. Towles - 4720 South Chelsea Lane - Bethesda, Maryland

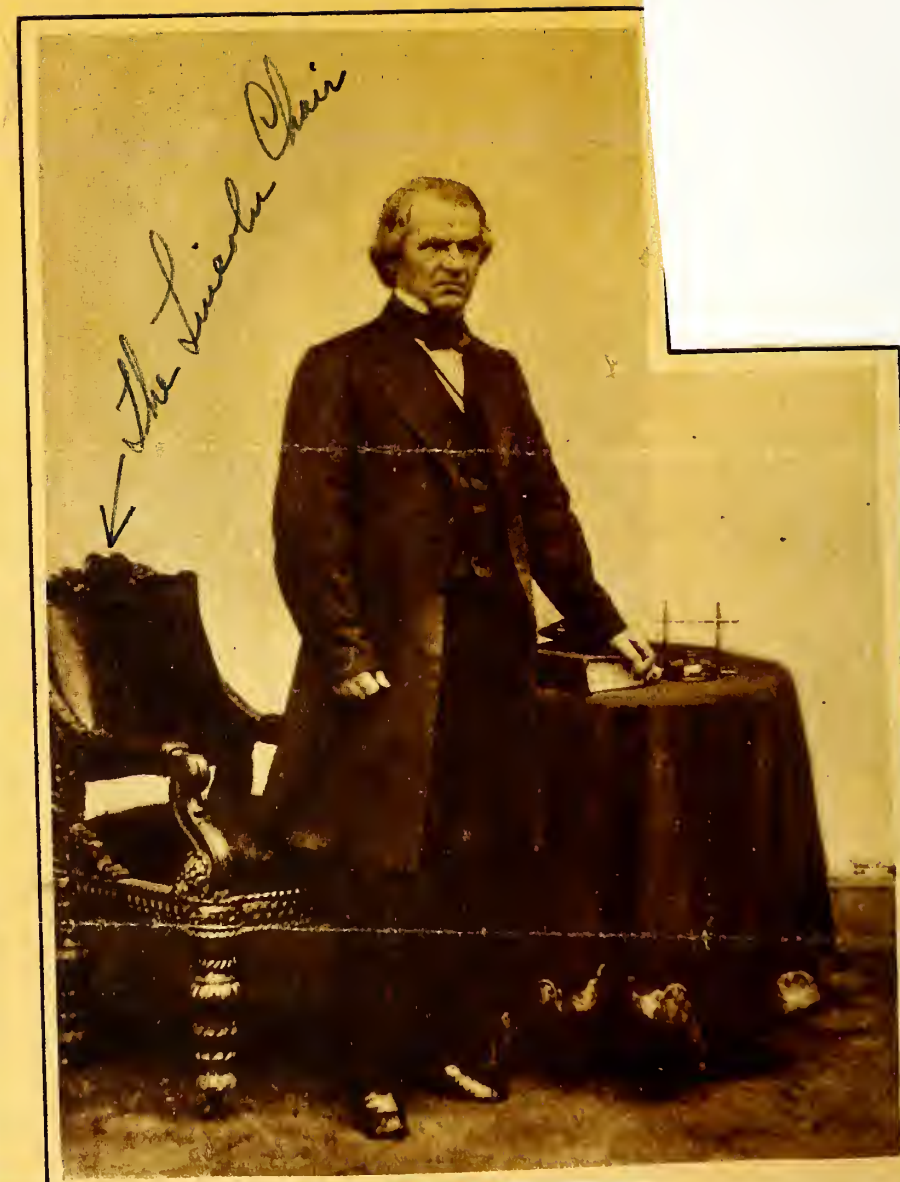
Have had many requests to donate it to different Lincoln Collections, but not being overly burdened with funds and being past the age of production, I am considering selling the chair. Should certainly like to have it placed in a fitting collection and from reports I do think the Lincoln Life Foundation is where it should be.

Have affidavits, which I would be glad to submit, to prove the authenticity of the chair. If you are interested would very much like to have your consideration & offer.

Thank you, I am

Very truly yours

Will H. Towles.



Andrew Johnson, seventeenth President of the United States, who succeeded to a stormy term in the White House on Lincoln's assassination.

© Brady Collection of L. C. Handy Studios.

December 1, 1943

Mr. Will H. Towles
4720 S. Chelsea Lane
Bethesda, Md.

My dear Mr. Towles:

Thank you for thinking of us with respect to the Lincoln chair which we trust you may be able to place somewhere as it is indeed an interesting item.

We are not so situated here that we could handle Lincoln curios to an advantage and have never acquired any except those that might be in miniature.

If you would care to advise us what you are asking for the chair we will be very glad indeed to file your letter in our curio information file as we often have people writing to us with respect to such items as you have. The chair should be placed permanently in some place where it may be well preserved.

Very truly yours,

LAW:WM

Director

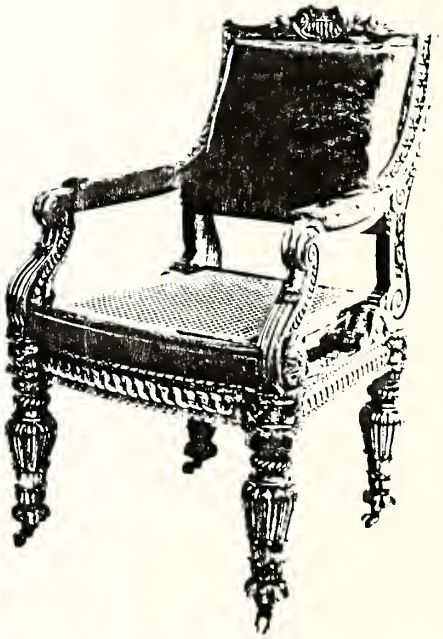
OFFERED SUBJECT TO PRIOR SALE: Donald F. X. Finn 800-647-6752

1985 photo - original ? blue
leather covered by protective fabric.

Marked: A. Bembe and A. Kimbel
(Broadway address NYC)

(curiously, original leather of these chairs was red, changed c. 1859-50 to black & brown. This rare blue leather may have been used by The Speaker or other official. Three chairs of the original 262 were so used per Brady photo) This chair may have been owned by Hamlin of Maine (Congress 1843-7, Senate 1857-61, V.P. 1861-5).

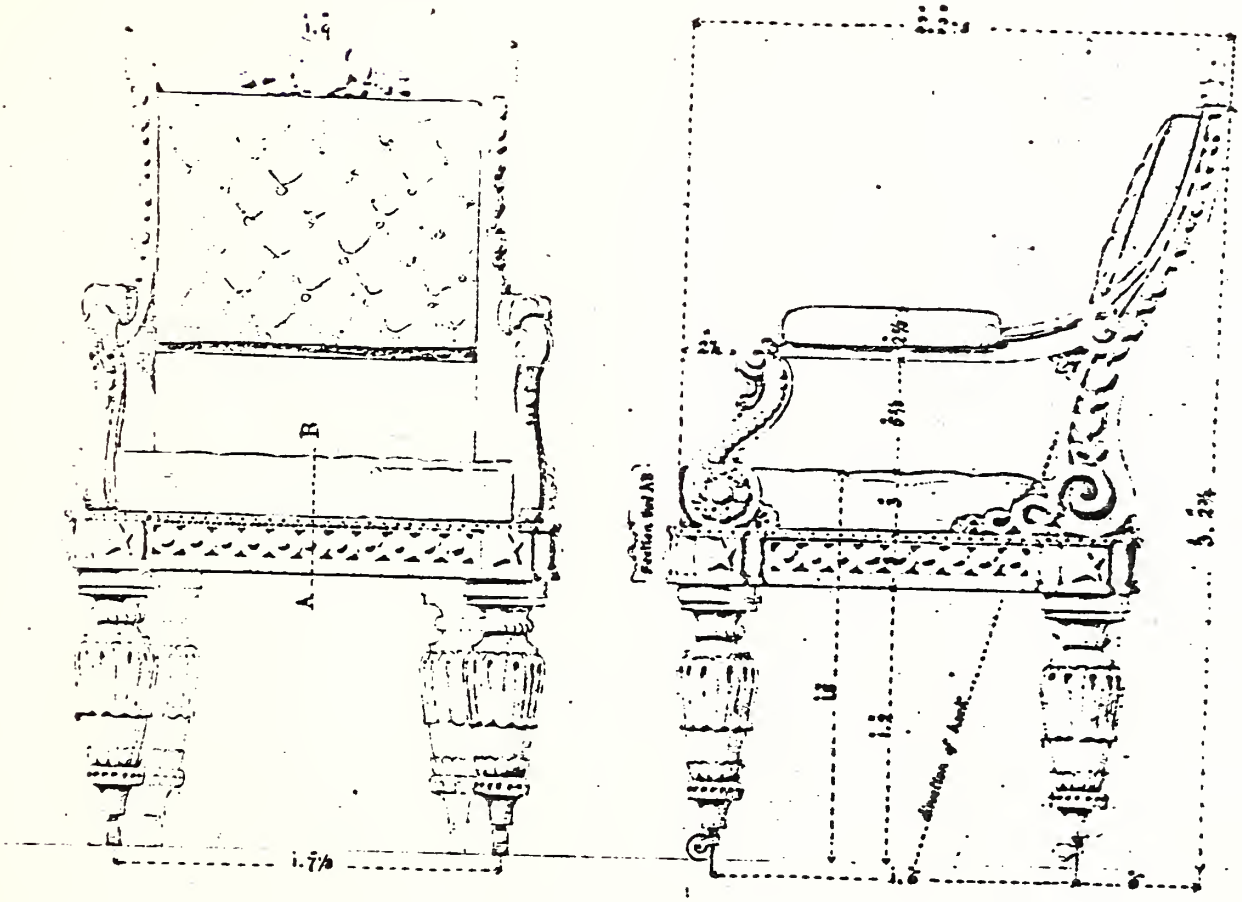
Said to be
Lincoln's Chair in the White House
according to previous owner (20 yrs ago)

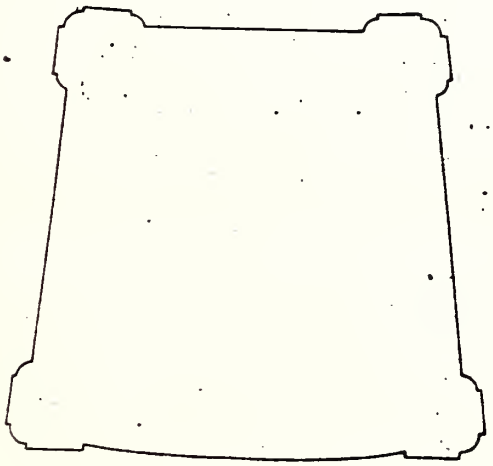


U. S. Capitol Chair - designed 1857 by
Thomas U. Walter, Architect of the Capitol

131 chairs made by Bembe & Kimbel NYC

131 chairs made by Hammitt Desk Manufactu
Co., Philadelphia





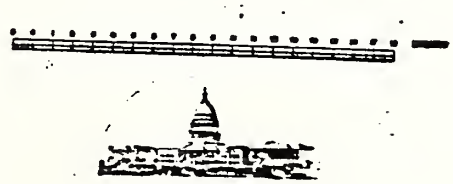
No 1420

DESIGN FOR CHAIRS OF

HALLS OF CONGRESS

SCALE 1/4 OF FULL SIZE

Wm Meeg
Clerk of Engrs
in charge



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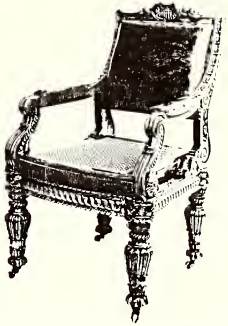
Said to be Lincoln's Chair in the White House according to previous owner (20 yrs ago)



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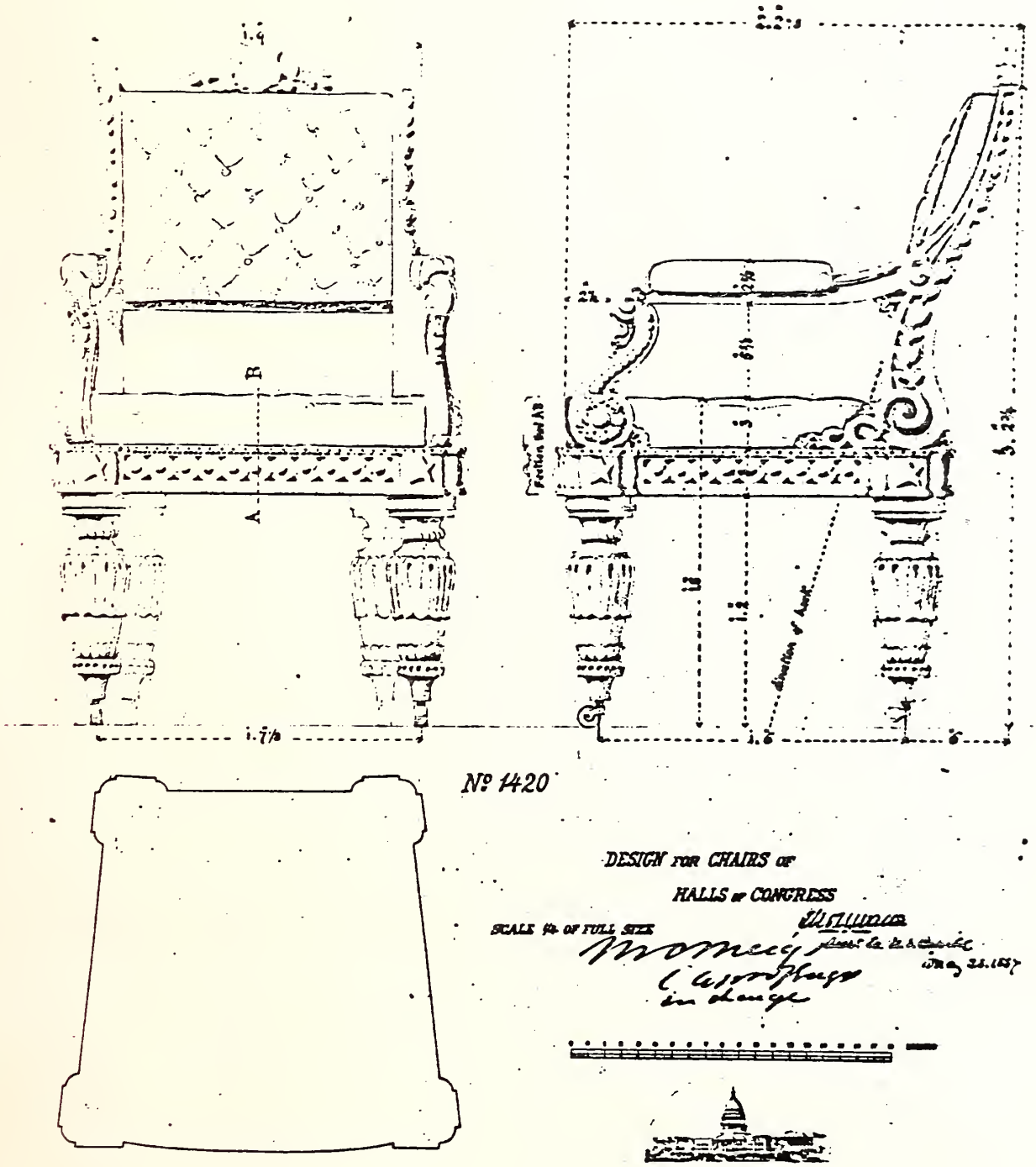

No 1420
DESIGN FOR CHAIRS OF
HALLS OF CONGRESS
SCALE ¼ OF FULL SIZE

"GOING! GOING! GONE FROM MAINE" — The only known so-called "Lincoln Chair" in New England is sold for $600 to a Massachusetts dealer by Auctioneer Robert G. Hall of Dover-Foxcroft at one of Bob Foster's auctions at Round Pond. There were originally 262 of these carved oak chairs in the U. S. Congress. When the Confederate States withdrew 175 members, their chairs were sold. The whereabouts of all but five are unknown. One is in the Smithsonian Institute, two in the Lincoln Room of the memorial at the University of Horrogate in Tennessee, and one in the building of the Chicago Historical Society. The chair sold at the Round Pond auction came from a Bar Harbor estate. President Abraham Lincoln was often photographed sitting in one of these chairs, and the famous Civil War photographer, Mathew B. Brady also used one between 1863 and 1877 to pose such famous people as President Ulysses S. Grant, General Robert E. Lee, General William Tecumseh Sherman, President Rutherford B. Hayes, Mark Twain and Andrew Carnegie.

— Photo by E. L. Boutilier

For amusement only!

Portland (Me.) Sunday Telegram, Dec. 26, 1954

Know Your HEIRLOOMS

by Tom Ormsbee

Readers may get specific information about any heirloom by writing Tom Ormsbee, New Canaan, Conn., enclosing a clear photograph and description of the heirloom. Also enclose a self-addressed envelope and 15 cents to cover stenographic costs. (Copyright 1954).

American furniture with documented historic associations is not plentiful. Some readers may recognize the chair illustrated as the one which appears in a number of portrait photographs taken by Matthew B. Brady, famous Washington photographer of the Civil War period. Probably the best known is the portrait of President Lincoln and his son Tad.

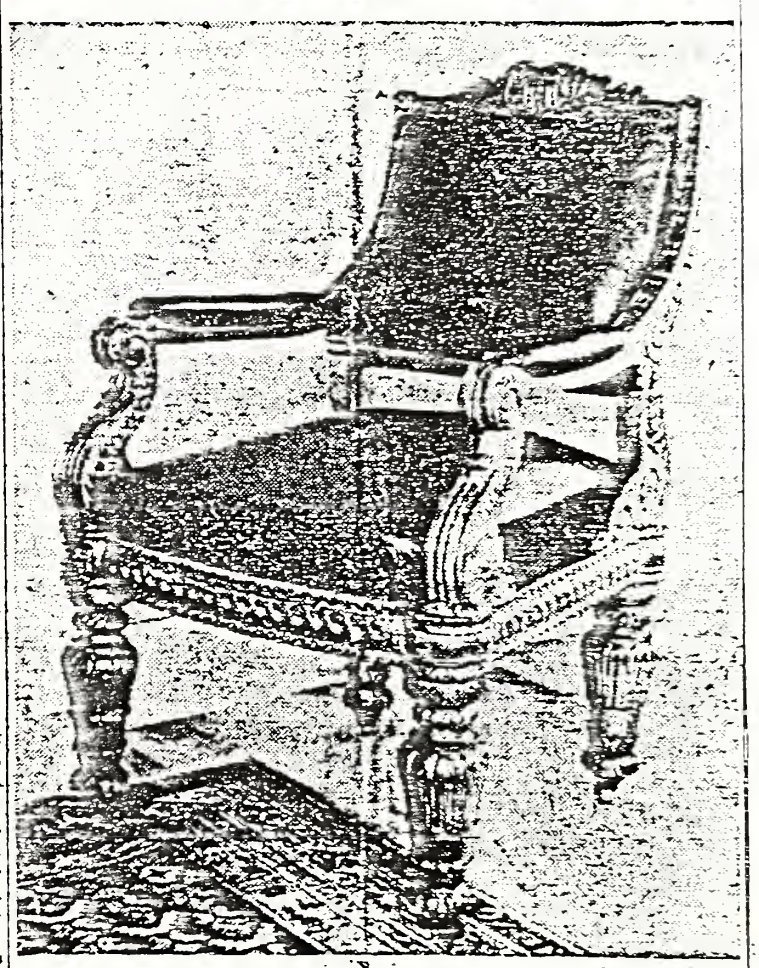
It shows Lincoln seated, holding a book, and his son standing beside him. Taken only four days before his assassination, it was copied as a small folio print which was very popular and framed copies hung in many homes of the period. The chair was used in Brady's photographic studio from 1863 to 1877. During that time it was an essential property and figured in a considerable number of portrait photographs including those of General Grant, Robert E. Lee, General Sherman, President Hayes, Mark Twain, Andrew Carnegie and other noted citizens.

How one of the chairs of this design came into Brady's possession is still open to conjecture. The story of it I have been able to piece together chiefly from records of the office of the Architect of the Capitol. This piece of antiquarian research was stimulated nearly a year ago when a reader living in Maine sent me a snapshot of the chair shown here which he had inherited from an uncle who had lived in Washington.

In 1857 when the wings of the Capitol containing larger chambers for the Senate and House of Representatives were completed, the one for the House was furnished with these carved oak chairs. They were especially designed by Thomas U. Walter who then held the post of Architect of the Capitol and had designed the Senate and House wings and the cast iron dome that surmounts the central section.

There were 262 of these carved oak chairs, supplied, if not made, by Doe Hazelton Company of Boston for $90 each. From 1857 to 1873 they were the chairs in which Congressmen sat during sessions of the House. In 1857 there were 241 members. When the representatives of the eleven states which formed the Confederacy withdrew, the number of members was reduced to 175.

This resulted in an excess of these Walter chairs which he had designated as "Chairs of Halls of Congress" in his original drawings. Some of these extras were sent to other government buildings; one is known to have been used by Lincoln in the White House and one found its way to the Brady studios to become his favorite posing chair. How many are still extant is so far unknown. There is the one in Maine, one in the Smithsonian Institution Collection, two in the Lincoln Room of Lincoln Memorial University at Horrogate, Tennessee, and one in the collection of the Chicago Historical Society.



CONGRESSIONAL CHAIR—A massive carved oak armchair of the Victorian period, its use in the House of Representatives is indicated by American shield that forms cresting on back. Design also includes five-pointed stars and sprays of laurel leaves. Such chairs were used in the House chamber from 1857 to 1873 when they were replaced by less bulky mahogany ones.

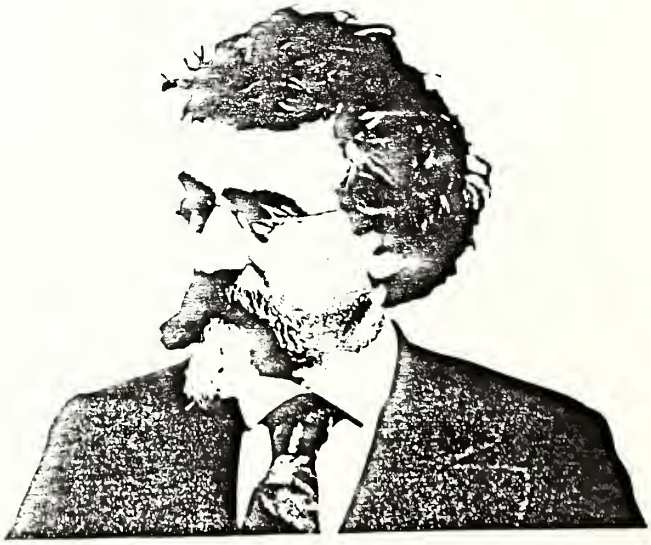
Mathew Brady

HISTORIAN WITH A CAMERA

By James D. Horan

PICTURE COLLATION BY

Gertrude Horan



CROWN PUBLISHERS, INC. - NEW YORK

NOTE CHAIR

153. Lincoln and Tad. This picture has appeared many times as a portrait taken by Brady in the White House. The artist Francis B. Carpenter wrote in his diary that A. Berger made this picture on February 9, 1864, the date of the famous Brady portrait of Lincoln (No. 143) taken in Brady's gallery.

By Brady or A. Berger

154. A portrait of Lincoln taken on February 25 1861, the day the President-elect arrived in Washing ton for his inauguration. *By Brad*

12

2500 Roslyn Avenue,
Baltimore 16, Md.

December 8, 1952

Dr. Louis A. Warren, Editor "Lincoln Lore",
Lincoln National Life Insurance Co.,
Fort Wayne, Indiana

Dear Dr. Warren:

Recently there has come into the writer's possession an antique (and perhaps historical) chair, which appears to be identical to the ones in the famous photographs of Lincoln by Mathew B. Brady.

I am wondering whether any collector or historical organization devoted to Lincolniana would be interested in acquiring this handsome chair, and would appreciate any advice or information you care to offer.

I would be grateful if you will place my name on your mailing list to receive copies of your publication.

With many thanks for your courtesy, I am

Very truly yours,

Samson Feldman

40½ inches high

25 inches wide

POST CARD

CORRESPONDENCE ADDRESS

San[illegible]an
2500 Roslyn Ave.,
Baltimore 16, Md.

San[illegible]an
2500 Roslyn Ave.,
Baltimore 16, Md.

(2)
1318

December 11, 1952

Mr. Samson Feldman
2500 Roslyn Avenue
Baltimore 16, Maryland

My dear Mr. Feldman:

Thank you very much for submitting a picture of the chair which you have in your possession and with your permission we will it in case we do have inquiries for such pieces as we very often do.

There seems to have been several chairs of this type similar to which Brady used. Whether they had a common origin I could not say.

I regret that we do not select furniture or curios of any kind here for lack of room for display so we would not be in the market for items of this type.

We will be pleased to place your name on our mailing list to receive Lincoln Lore.

Very truly yours,

Director

LAW:jaf
Dr. Louis A. Warren

March 15, 1957

Mr. Samson Feldman
2500 Roslyn Avenue
Baltimore 16, Maryland

Dear Mr. Feldman:

I have been looking through the files of the Lincoln National Life Foundation and I find some correspondence that you had with Dr. Warren back in December of 1952. At that time you wrote him that you had come into possession of a very interesting histtorical chair which is identical to the one used by Mathew B. Brady in his studio.

This chair is sometimes called the Congregational Chair or the Brady Chair.

According to your letter of December 8, 1952 you made some inquiries as to whether or not the Foundation might be interested in it's purchase. I am wondering at this time if you have sold the chair or if it is still for sale. If you still have the chair in your possession I would like very much to know what you are asking for it.

While I am not in a position to acquire it immediately I am under the impression that if the price is reasonable that I might make some future plans to purchase it sometime within the next few months.

Hoping to hear from you, I remain yours,

Sincerely,

RGMcMurtry:dh

Director

(2)

2500 Roslyn Avenue,
Baltimore 16, Md.

March 26, 1957

Dr. R. Gerald McMurtry,
The Lincoln National Life Foundation,
Fort Wayne, Indiana

Dear Dr. McMurtry:

Thank you for your letter of March 15th regarding the historical chair referred to as the Brady chair. It is still available for purchase and I enclose another photograph for your records. The chair is upholstered in what is believed to be the original green cut velvet.

My late father's estate, which is now being settled, has a part interest in this chair. Tha appraisers have listed it in the appraisal at $750.00 because of its historical interest and condition. That is also the figure we are using for insurance purposes.

However, the estate wishes to dispose of its interest in this chair if a satisfactory offer is received. As for the writer, I would be willing to go along with whatever offer the estate is agreeable to accepting.

I shall look forward to hearing from you and will submit any suggestions.

Sincerely yours,

Samson Feldman

Samson Feldman

April 17, 1957

Mr. Samson Feldman
2500 Roslyn Avenue
Baltimore 16, Maryland

Dear Mr. Feldman:

I have your letter of March 26th regarding the Congressional Chair which is being held as a part of your late father's Estate.

I note that the Chair has been appraised for $750.00 because of its interesting historical connection. Of course that connection is not necessarily with Brady, but the fact that the Chair was designed by T. U. Walter, the capitol architect and that the Chair was used in the halls of Congress shortly before Lincoln became the sixteenth President.

I have been trying to figure out some way by which I could use this Chair for exhibit purposes. Unfortunately, it does not fit into our scheme of things and I could better use a pair than one.

Your letter more or less opened up to me an invitation to place a bid on this Chair and I want you to know that I am still giving it consideration. My appropriation has just about been spent for the current year 1956 and 1957 and after the first of July, I hope to be in better financial position to further study your chair and to make you an offer for it.

Thanking you for your letter, I remain,

Yours sincerely,

Director

RGM:bb

2500 Roslyn Avenue,
Baltimore 16, Md.

July 24, 1957

Dr. R. Gerald McMurtry,
The Lincoln National Life Foundation,
Fort Wayne, Indiana

Dear Dr. McMurtry:

Last April we had some correspondence regarding a historical chair having a close relationship to the Lincoln era.

It so happens that our property is in the process of being sold and everything will have to be moved or put into storage.

I am wondering whether you have had an opportunity to think further about this historical chair and whether you may be near a decision as to an offer. My family would like very much to see this handsome chair in an appropriate setting such as The Lincoln National Life Foundation could provide.

If you are in a position to submit an offer for the chair in the near future, I would appreciate hearing from you and to submit your proposal to those concerned.

With many thanks for your consideration, I am,

Sincerely yours,

Samson Feldman

Samson Feldman

July 29, 1957

Mr. Samson Feldman
2500 Roslyn Avenue
Baltimore 16, Md.

Dear Mr. Feldman:

I wish to acknowledge your letter of July 24th sent to Dr. McMurtry, and to advise you that he is out of the office on a business trip.

Upon his return I will bring your letter to his attention.

Yours sincerely,

(Mrs.) Sally Hensch

s/h

August 2, 1957

Mr. Samson Feldman
2500 Roslyn Ave.
Baltimore 16, Md.

Dear Mr. Feldman:

I have your letter of July 24, 1957 regarding the Congressional chair which you have in your possession.

I am still interested in acquiring the chair for our Foundation Collection, however, I do not want to consider its purchase at a high figure.

While the chair is of the Lincoln period, and he often sat in such a chair to have his photograph made, the chair in itself is not a Lincoln relic. That is a significant fact I must keep in mind when considering its purchase.

Please give me the very lowest price you are asking for the chair and I will either accept or decline your offer.

Hoping to hear from you very soon, I remain

Yours sincerely,

RGM:sh

R. Gerald McMurtry

2500 Roslyn Avenue,
Baltimore 16, Md.

August 6, 1957

Dr. R. Gerald McMurtry,
The Lincoln National Life Foundation,
Fort Wayne 1, Indiana

Dear Dr. McMurtry:

Thank you for your letter of Aug. 2nd regarding the historical chair. As I wrote in my letter of March 26th the appraisers for the Estate placed a value of $750.00 on this antique chair. You indicated in your letter of April 17th that you might be in a position to make an offer which I could submit to the family.

Since several items in the Estate have been sold at prices lower than the appraiser's valuation, may I suggest that you authorize me to submit an offer to the family of between $400. and $500. I believe that a definite offer in this price range, approximately half the appraiser's valuation, would be acceptable to the family. I hesitate to communicate with members of my family who live out of the city until I hear further from you, tho I feel reasonably sure that they will follow my recommendations in the matter.

As I wrote in my last letter we would all like to see the chair find a 'home' fitting to its historical background, and the family hopes that your Foundation will arrange to acquire it.

Looking forward to hearing from you, I am

Sincerely yours,

Samson Feldman

Samson Feldman

Its name indicates its character

The Lincoln National Life Foundation

Fort Wayne, Indiana

R. GERALD McMURTRY
DIRECTOR

August 8, 1957

8/12

Mr. Mayer -
I believe that we should try to buy items like this. It has been many years since we put new money into the museum - all the offers we receive could consume our budget - Do you agree as to general policy statement in above submittal?

Mr. Allen C. Steere
Vice President and General Counsel
Home Office

Dear Allen:

I want to submit to you the enclosed correspondence. Perhaps we can discuss this matter next week.

This Congressional chair (See photo) was designed by T.U. Walter, the Capitol architect and was used in the halls of Congress. Later they were discarded and Brady and Gardner purchased some of these chairs for their photographic studios. Often when Lincoln had his photograph made he was seated in such a chair (See photo).

Lincoln Memorial University had two of these chairs in their collection. In the June 1947 issue of the Lincoln Herald I wrote the enclosed article (See photostat) concerning the chair.

I think we should consider the purchase of the chair. I believe a bid of $350. would buy it.

seller to pay cost of shipping

Sincerely,

Gerald

R. Gerald McMurtry

RGM:sh
enc.

P.S. I will be on vacation Friday August 9th to Tuesday Aug. 13th

AJS

See note attached

Allen -

This is OK if within the budget. In general, however, I would rather see our facility take the shape of a Lincoln library and info center than the form of a museum + curiosity shop.

WJM

8/13/57

3700 N. Charles St.,
Baltimore, Maryland 21218

October 21, 1978

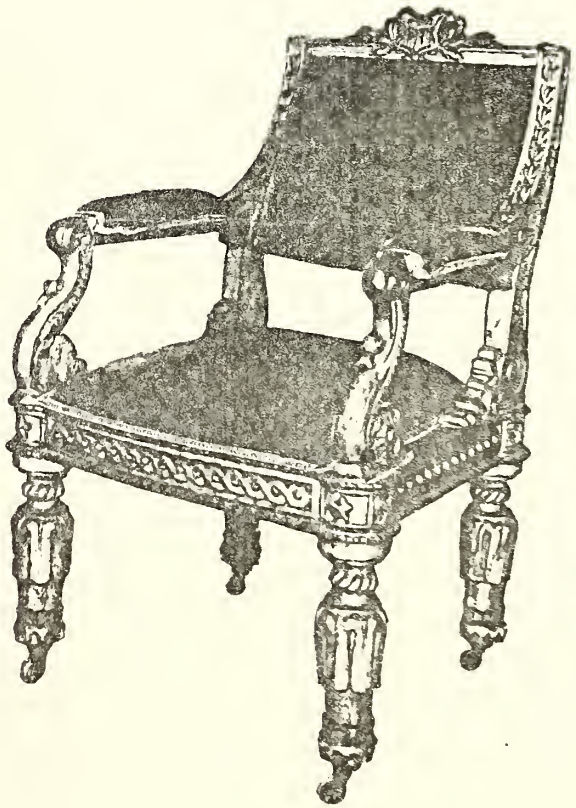
Mr. Mark E. Neely, Jr.,
LINCOLN LORE
Lincoln National Life Insurance Co.,
Fort Wayne, Indiana 46801

Dear Mr. Neely:

I bring to your attention a rare historical original of mid-nineteenth century Americana referred to as the Lincoln chair. The chair pictured below was used in the U.S. House of Representatives when Abraham Lincoln served as Congressman in 1847. This chair was acquired by my father many years ago from an old Maryland family whose forebears were friends of the Lincoln family.

This handsome ornately carved chair appears identical to those pictured in the many photographs of Lincoln by the famous Civil War photographer Mathew Brady. The chair is in excellent condition and upholstered in the faded green cut-velvet popular over a century ago. The sturdy frame is carved in crisp period style with U.S. Shield, stars, oak leaves and other typical period details.

We have decided to part with this family treasure. It has been appraised at $3500. If you are interested in acquiring this rare American chair we would be pleased to hear from you.



Very truly yours,

Samson Feldman

P.S. The chair measures 40½ " high, 25" wide and 27" in depth.

Feldman

THE LOUIS A. WARREN
LINCOLN LIBRARY AND MUSEUM

1300 SOUTH CLINTON STREET / FORT WAYNE, INDIANA 46801

Telephone (219) 424-5421

MARK E. NEELY, JR.
Director

November 8, 1978

Mr. Samson Feldman
Northway Apts. #1006
3700 N. Charles St.
Baltimore, MD 21218

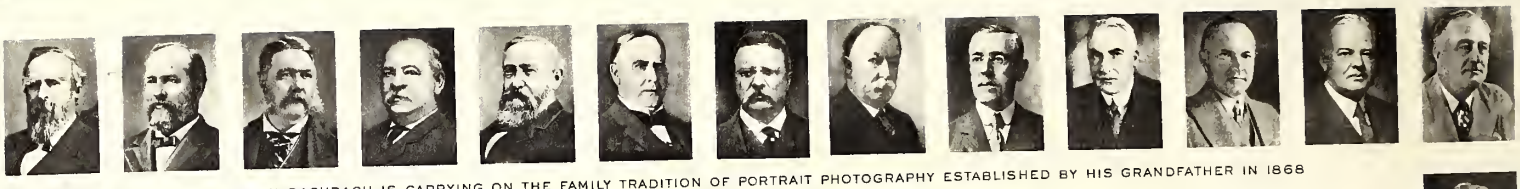
Dear Mr. Feldman:

Thank you very much for the offer of the chair. I am afraid that we cannot at this time entertain the notion of purchasing it.

Yours truly,

Mark E. Neely, Jr.

MEN/jaf



FABIAN BACHRACH IS CARRYING ON THE FAMILY TRADITION OF PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHY ESTABLISHED BY HIS GRANDFATHER IN 1868

Fabian Bachrach

Photographer of Men

A. NORMAN NEEDY
VICE PRESIDENT

March 17, 1954
Our 86th Year

NEW YORK 22
54 EAST 52ND STREET
PLAZA 5-6233

LINCOLN LIFE
Referred to
REC'D MAR 19 1954
Answered
OFFICE OF PRESIDENT

Dear Mr. McAndless:

The enclosed small print of President Lincoln is a copy of a photograph I believe to have been made by Alexander Gardner in Washington on November 8, 1863, eleven days before he delivered the Gettysburg Address.

My grandfather was an assistant to the Leslie's Weekly photographer and helped photograph the crowd at Gettysburg. I have heard countless Civil War stories from him and from my father who, for years, has been a student of the Civil War. So, I was thrilled to be able to acquire, a short time ago, the chair in which Gardner photographed President Lincoln.

The chair is in excellent condition and is now in use here at our New York studio.

Perhaps a photograph of yourself in the Lincoln chair would be of interest to you either for personal or business use, or both. Perhaps a collection of individual photographs of your executives taken in the Lincoln chair would be of interest for display, publicity or advertising purposes.

Possibly the Lincoln chair doesn't interest you at all but a good, new photograph does. In either case, we would be happy to arrange an appointment for a sitting when next you visit New York. Drop us a line or telephone us at Plaza 5-6233. Our most important single job is making photographs of men which reproduce well in newspapers and magazines.

Yours very truly,

Fabian Bachrach

FB:S

Mr. Alva J. McAndless, President
Lincoln National Life Insurance Company
1301 South Harrison Street
Fort Wayne 1, Indiana

P.S. We haven't the Lincoln chair in Chicago but we do make excellent photographs in our Studio for Men at 104 South Michigan, telephone Central 6-1991.

March 19, 1954

Mr. Fabian Bachrach
54 East 52nd Street
New York, 22, N. Y.

Dear Mr. Bachrach:

Your letter addressed to Mr. Alva J. McAndless, the late President of our Company, has been directed to our department for reply.

We are greatly pleased to learn of your interest in Lincolniana and in the fact that you have in your possession at your New York studio the chair in which President Lincoln sat when he was photographed by Alexander Gardner in 1863.

We are placing your letter together with the photograph in our files as we have inquiries, from time to time, relative to such items of Lincolniana.

Thanking you for advising us of your possession, I remain

Sincerely yours,

Margaret Moellering
Secretary to Dr. Warren

m/m

7

Round Ridge,
New York
Sept. 3, 1954

Dr. Louis A. Warren, Director
The Lincoln National Life Foundation,
Fort Wayne,
Indiana.

Dear Dr. Warren,

Stefan Lorant has called to my attention Lincoln Lore Number 1718, July 12, 1954 which contains an article "Chairs Used by The Lincolns." Would you be good enough to send me a copy? Thank you.

Since I wrote you last spring I have been researching the origin etc of the chairs in which Lincoln posed for photographs by both Matthew B. Brady and Alexander Gardner. So far by the aid of the Smithsonia Institution and David Lynn, Architect of the Capitol just retired I have been able to establish the complete history of the massive carved armchair used by those photographers in 1864 and 1865. It was from the set of chairs which Thomas U. Walter, then Architect of the Capitol designed for the new chamber of the House of Representations in 1857.

The chair used in earlier photographs with an open arched back still eludes me. This chair can best be sent in the series of Lincoln portraits taken by Brady in May, 1861. The best of these of Lincoln seated is reproduced as Illustration 48 Mr. Lincoln's Camera Man by Roy Merredith. Can you shed any light on its origin?

From my investigation to date I have not been able to place this earlier chair with the open arched back as part of the set used in the chambers of either the Senate or the House before they were provided with larger quarters in the wings of the U. S. Capitol completed in 1857. This dispite claim made by some that this open-back armchair was the one Lincoln used during his term as a member of the House and subsequently gave to Brady.

Faithfully

Thomas H. Ormsbee

September 10, 1954

Mr. Thomas H. Ormsbee
Pound Ridge, New York

My dear Mr. Ormsbee:

We trust you may be successful in finding the origin of the chair in which Lincoln was seated when Brady photographed him in 1861. My feeling is that there was no history associated with it but merely a chair in the photographer's studio, with no historical connection.

We are happy to enclose several copies of Lincoln Lore #1318.

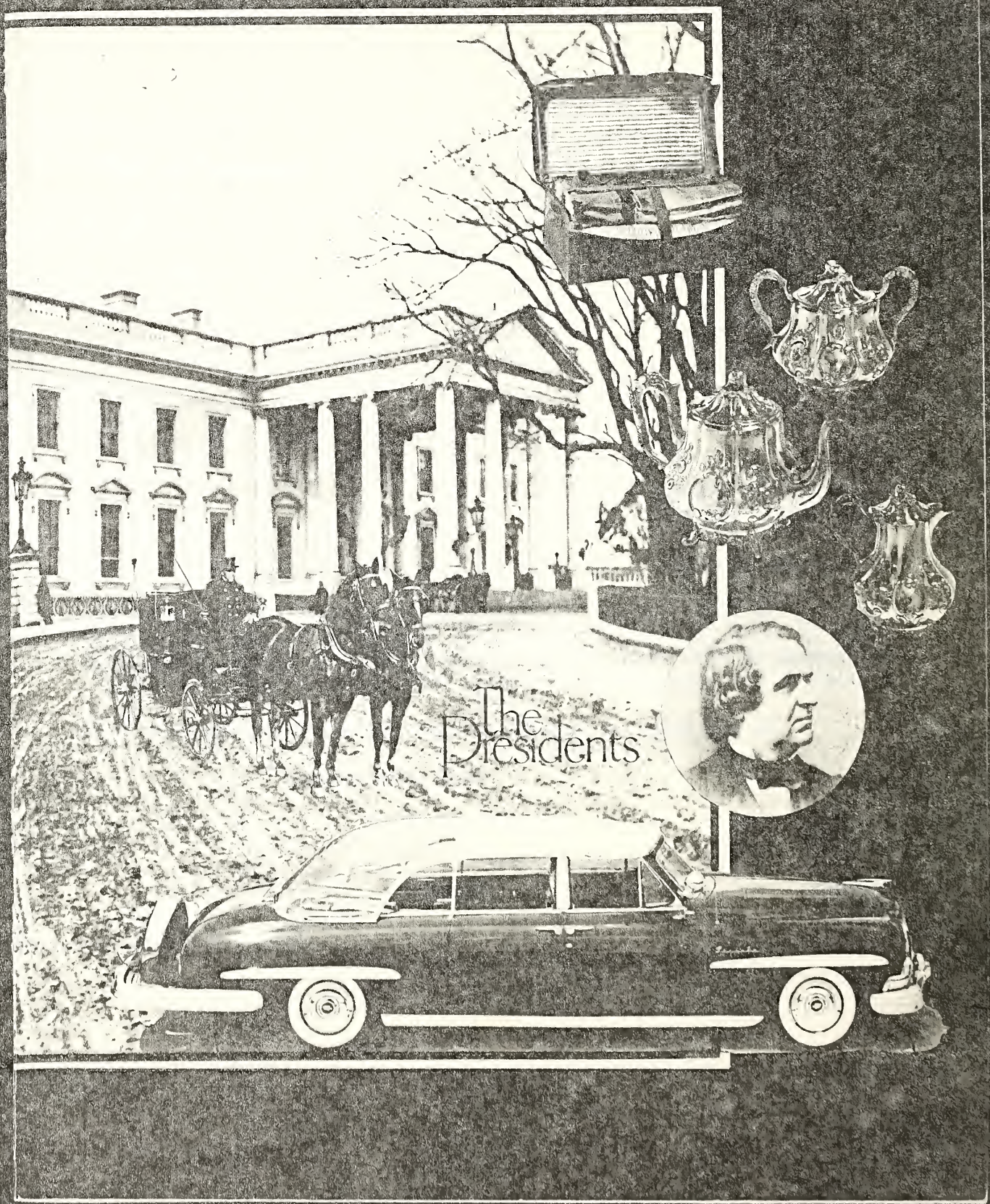
Very truly yours,

Director

LAW/JLA
Enc.

The Herald

Vol. 9, No. 2 Spring 1980
Greenfield Village and Henry Ford Museum
Dearborn, Michigan



New Accessions

by Katharine Bryant Hagler
Curator, Furniture

As early as the 18th century, architects sometimes indulged themselves in designing not only a structure itself, but suitable furnishings for the structure as well. Such was the case with the two illustrated pieces from the Henry Ford Museum collections. Noted architect Thomas Ustick Walter (1804-87) designed sets of both for use by the United States House of Representatives in the new wing of the Capitol. The armchair has been part of the collections for several years. The companion desk is a recent acquisition.

Thomas U. Walter was considered to be a man of consummate taste. His designs ranged from houses, including the magnificent facade on the river side of the Biddle's Andalusia (Bucks County, Pennsylvania), to public buildings, notably Girard College in Philadelphia. For 15 years, 1851-65, he served as architect and construction supervisor for the cast-iron dome and the House and Senate extensions of the United States Capitol in Washington, D.C.

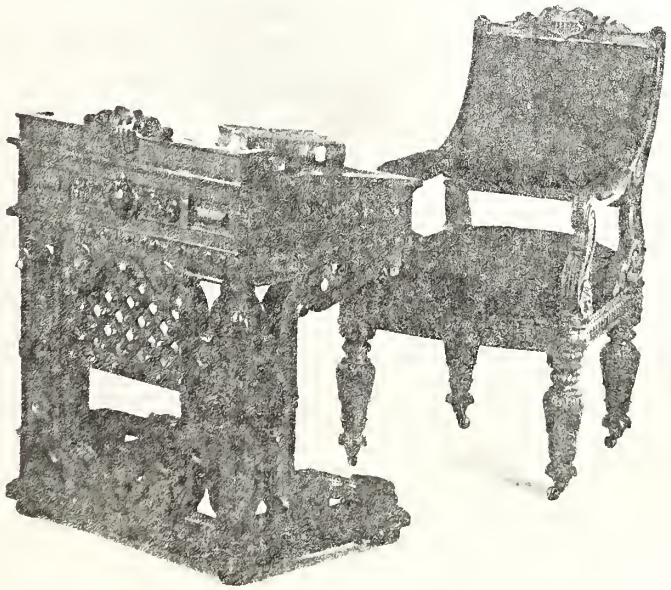
In 1857 two qualified firms were commissioned to construct Walter's congressional armchairs and desks — Bembe & Kimmel of New York City and Doe Hazelton & Co. of Boston. The number of pieces involved (in 1857 there were 236 members of the House) undoubtedly caused the split order.

Both chair and desk are made of oak and are surmounted by carved stars and stripes within a shield. The desk bears an additional patriotic motif — an orb crossed by a carved ribbon with the incised word "AMERICA." Other carved patterns include scrolls, gadrooning, leafage, lattice work and medallions. The desk was designed to be freestanding, thus all sides were finished. It is unknown which of the two commissioned firms made the Henry Ford Museum's desk, but the chair bears the stenciled name of Bembe & Kimmel.

Congressmen considered the chairs too heavy to move about easily. Thus, after only two years' usage, they were replaced in 1859. Many were returned a year later to the House and in the early 1860s some were sold. Among the purchasers of the chairs were Alexander Gardner and Mathew Brady, the eminent photographers. Gardner and Brady put them to immediate and frequent use as studio chairs. Existing photographs of several well-known personages seated in these chairs include Abraham Lincoln (see related story, page 19), James Garfield, Andrew Johnson and Mark Twain.

The desks were better accepted by the congressmen and were used continuously until 1868 and perhaps later. Public auction claimed some, if not all, in 1873. The number of surviving chairs and desks is not known.

Often when a piece of furniture is separated from the building for which it was designed, it can appear extravagant in ornamentation or design. Whatever the aesthetic judgment on the congressional desk and accompanying armchair, however, they undeniably represent another documented facet of 19th-century American life.



Carl Malerka

Lincoln's chair offers couple part of history

By CAROLE CURTIS
Herald Times Reporter
Valders Correspondent

MANITOWOC — Darlyne Berg of Milwaukee gave Imogene and Mickey Weber a seat in history recently.

Berg is the owner of a richly-carved oak chair that has been traced back to Abraham Lincoln. When the upholstery on the chair became frayed, Berg decided to have it reupholstered, so she brought it to Manitowoc to Weber's Upholstery Shop on Knuell Street.

Berg and her husband, Russell, bought the Lincoln chair during an estate sale at the Milwaukee Auction Galleries in the spring of 1964. The sale was composed of items from the home of one of the brewing magnates, Berg thought, because it featured the most magnificent pieces she has ever seen.

The chair was offered along with a photograph by Alexander Gardner, showing President Lincoln comfortably seated with his elbow on the detailed arms and the presidential crest peaking from behind his head. It didn't come with actual documentation, Berg said, but was reputed to be the Lincoln chair.

Afterwards, Berg came across additional proof in the form of other pictures showing

(See *Lincoln*, page A-2)

Darlyne Berg, of Milwaukee, is the proud owner of a chair that has been traced back to Abraham Lincoln. The chair was in Manitowoc to be reupholstered at Weber's Upholstery. Photo by Carole Curtis

Manitowoc HERALD TIMES-REPORTER 18:177 June 28, 1990 pp. 1-2

Lincoln

(Continued from page 1)

Lincoln in the same crested chair that convinced her of its authenticity.

Berg is the daughter of Manitowoc resident Betty Olson and brought the chair along on one of her visits to the Lakeshore. The former Holy Innocents schoolgirl is the producer of "Arts" Place," a showcase of the arts and entertainment on Channel 10 - WMVS of Milwaukee.

Berg and her husband, who owns B-Z Engineering, live with their four children in a 1930s English Tudor home filled with an eclectic collection of antiques.

Collecting bits of the past is Berg's passion. She is particularly drawn by vintage clothing and furniture.

"I have always loved marvelous old things," Berg said. "I would much rather have old than new."

Berg said she knew the Webers were the right folks to entrust her chair to because they care about the furniture they work with. Mickey takes the furniture apart and repairs the springs and woodwork, then his wife takes over.

Backed by careful research and 15 years of experience, Imogene restores a piece to its original beauty with a meticulous approach that stems from a true delight in working with antiques.

"Imogene obviously loves her work, and I am always delighted with the results," Berg said.

Antiques are more interesting to work with, Imogene explained. Historical pieces have a different, "more regal" feel than can be found in the overstuffed, more impersonal lines of modern furniture.

Although Berg always brings them lovely pieces to start with, Imogene said, the Lincoln chair was particularly fine. The hand-carved oak chair weighs nearly 70 pounds, and is heavily detailed with leaves, swirls, dots and stars. Crowning the back of the chair is the presidential shield, with three stars topping a series of stripes.

Some photographs of Lincoln in the chair show that the legs originally ended in rollers, because it seemed that the "Great Emancipator's" long legs required a higher seat. On Berg's chair, and in later pictures, metal pegs have been added to the bottom of the legs for additional altitude.

Berg considers Lincoln's chair priceless because of its historical value and antiqueness, and intends to donate it to a museum at some point in the future. Until then, it will sit in splendor in the foyer of the Berg home, lit softly by a crystal prism lamp at the side of an antique writing desk, and offering visitors a well-upholstered seat in the lap of history.

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Lincoln Lore

The Bulletin of THE LINCOLN MUSEUM

Number 1865 / Summer 2001

Table of Contents

Recent Acquisitions
2

Shadows of Lincoln in a Victorian Museum
by Jennifer Balliet-Milholland
9

Odyssey of a Knife
by Joan Flinspach
11

At The Lincoln Museum
12

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Alexander Gardner in his studio chair. (TLM #4102A) LN-0578

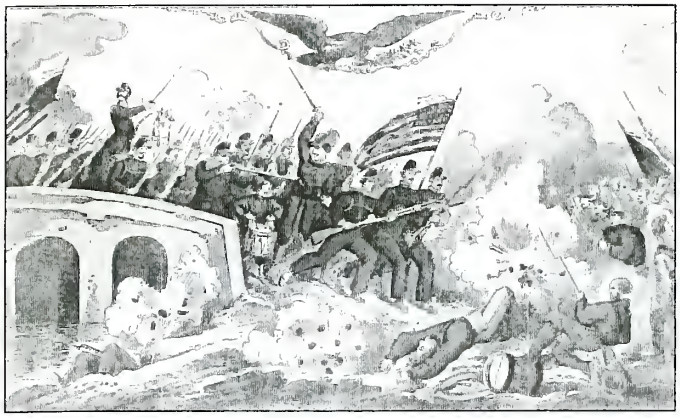
Recent Acquisitions

A Presidential Chair

Alexander Gardner was the most prolific of Abraham Lincoln's photographers. He took a total of 37 photographs of Lincoln, more than any of the other 32 photographers for whom Lincoln posed. Many of Gardner's Lincoln portraits were posed in, or near, the elegant Renaissance Revival style chair pictured on the cover, which was recently added to The Lincoln Museum collection.

Gardner emigrated from Glasgow in 1856 to join the studio of Mathew Brady. While working for Brady, he took some of the most dramatic photographs of the Civil War, including images of men killed at the battle of Antietam, September 17, 1862.

(On the cover: Alexander Gardner's studio chair. Inset: Photograph by Gardner of Abraham Lincoln seated in the chair, November 8, 1863 [TLM #O-79])



To a public accustomed to art that focused on the heroism and excitement of war, Gardner's photographs of dead bodies were revolutionary in their horror. Above: "The Battle of Antietam," published by Meisel, Lampe & Co. in 1863 (TLM #4186); below: Confederate casualties at Gettysburg, photographed by Timothy O'Sullivan of Alexander Gardner's studio (TLM #3109).

Lincoln posed with an identical chair belonging to the Brady studio for Anthony Berger on February 9, 1864. The Brady chair is now in the Abraham Lincoln Museum at Lincoln Memorial University in Harrogate, Tennessee. (TLM #O-94)

These photographs, displayed publicly in New York City, brought home to the Northern public the horrors of war in an unprecedented fashion.

Then as now, photographs taken by Gardner, Anthony Berger, and other talented employees of the Brady studio were frequently credited to Mathew Brady. For this reason, and because Brady was experiencing financial troubles that made it difficult for him to pay his staff, Gardner decided to establish his own business. He left the Brady studio in late 1862 or early 1863, and opened his own gallery on August 10, 1863.

Among the furnishings in Gardner's gallery was a solid oak chair designed in 1857 by Montgomery C. Meigs (who later served as Quartermaster General of the Union armies in the Civil War) and manufactured by Bembe and Kimmel of New York City. It was commissioned for use in the House of Representatives, and featured a patriotic shield emblem with stars and stripes built into the back. In 1859, this chair and many others were auctioned off by the government to make room for new furniture (because, according to Lloyd Ostendorf, "it proved too narrow for the rotund congressmen"). Sometime between 1859 and 1863, Gardner obtained one of the congressional chairs, as did his mentor Mathew Brady.

President Lincoln, who had promised Gardner that he would be his first sitter in the new studio, posed for him there on August 9, the day before the gallery's official opening, but did not use the congressional chair. On November 8, 1863, Lincoln returned to Gardner's studio, at the behest of the sculptor Sarah Fisher Ames. He posed in the congressional chair alone and with his secretaries John Nicolay and John Hay, resulting in photographs that Hay described as "some of the Prest. the best I have seen." In addition to adopting classic seated poses with his legs crossed, Lincoln that day sat for a set of "mug shots," staring directly into the camera and turning sideways for a profile portrait. These unconventional poses were presumably requested by Ames, who wanted them as models for the Lincoln bust that she was creating. Although Ames's work was good enough to be displayed in the Capitol, where it can still be seen, it pales beside the dramatic frontal photograph that was its inspiration.

Another artist, Matthew Wilson, provided the impetus for Lincoln's third and final visit to Gardner's studio. Wilson was a painter whose portrait of Lincoln would prove to be the last for

Presidential secretaries John Hay and John Nicolay with Lincoln, November 8, 1863. (TLM #O-76)

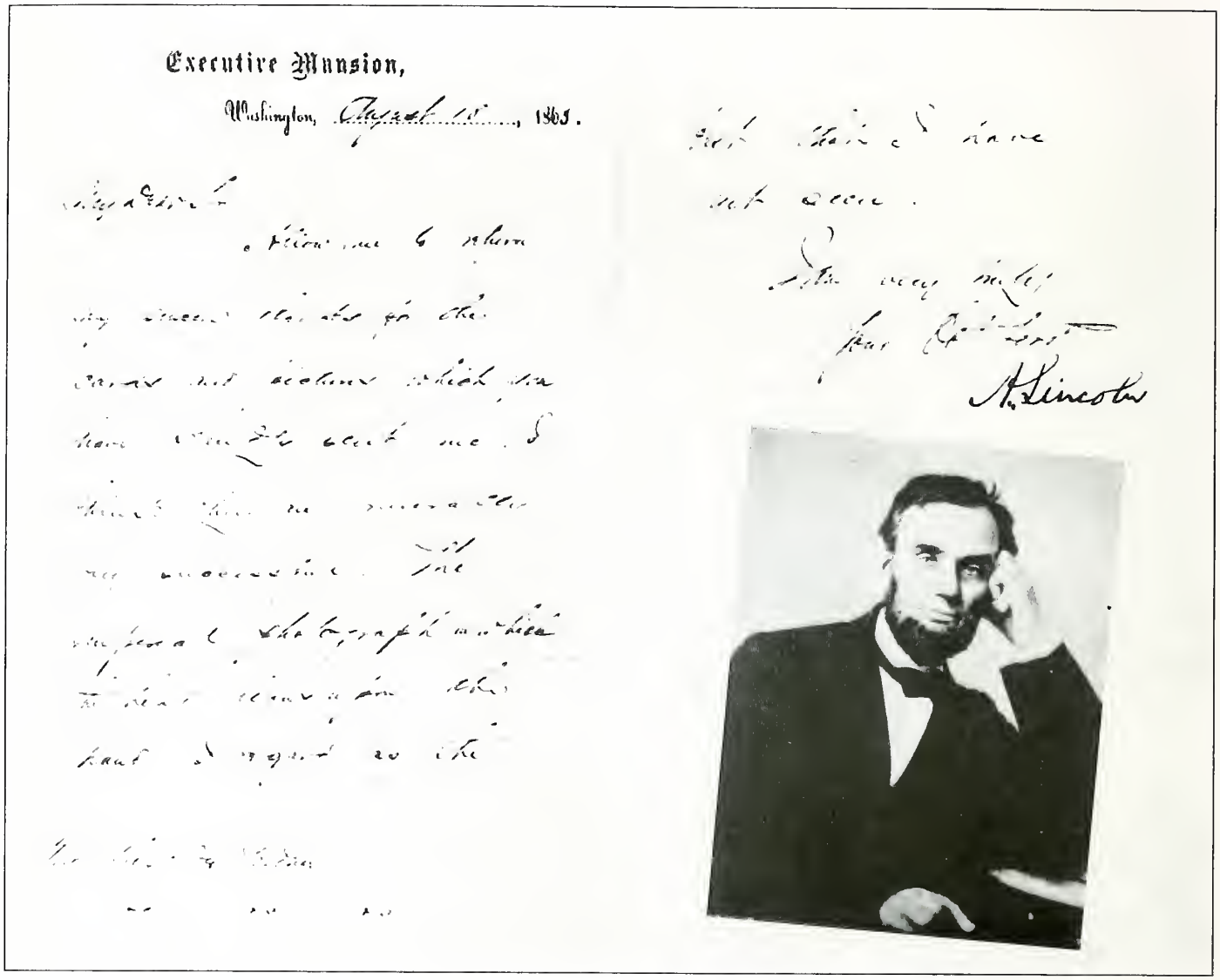
The detailed ornamentation of the chair's leg is visible in the picture of Lincoln and his son Tad, taken on February 5, 1865. (TLM #O-114)

"Some [photographs] of the Prest. the best I have seen": Lincoln in Gardner's chair, November 8, 1863. (TLM #O-78).

which Lincoln posed. On February 5, 1865, at 2 p.m. he met Lincoln at the gallery to observe, and perhaps direct, a series of photographs. All the images taken that day feature the president seated in Gardner's chair, including one posed with his son Tad, and several others in which Lincoln seemed almost to smile.

Gardner used the chair for portraits of other dignitaries, including Admiral David Farragut, Charles Sumner, and Lincoln's successor, Andrew Johnson. Gardner died in 1882; his wife Margaret Sinclair Gardner in 1897. The chair was inherited by his daughter Eliza, who donated it to the family's church, from which it was purchased by The Lincoln Museum in 2001.

The chair today is in excellent condition, with only a few modifications. Its original black leather upholstery was at some point in the 20th century replaced by a red synthetic covering, and the ball feet removed and replaced by casters. Photographs of Brady's version of the same chair show casters below the feet, making it possible that Gardner himself removed the original casters, perhaps to steady the chair.



Executive Mansion,

Washington, August 10, 1863.

Allow me to return my sincere thanks for the cards and pictures which you have kindly sent me. I think they are generally very successful. The imperial photograph in which the head leans upon the hand I regard as the best that I have yet seen.

Yours very truly

A. Lincoln

"Allow me to return my sincere thanks for the cards and pictures which you have kindly sent me. I think they are generally very successful. The imperial photograph in which the head leans upon the hand I regard as the best that I have yet seen." (TLM #O-74)

Lincoln's Letter to Gardner

Following Lincoln's first visit to the Gardner studio in August 1863, the photographer sent complimentary copies of his pictures to the White House. Lincoln responded with a letter to Gardner, written in John Hay's hand, expressing his thanks. This is the only known letter from Lincoln to Gardner, and does not appear in Roy Basler's *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*. It was donated by Gardner's daughter to her church, along with the chair, and obtained by The Lincoln Museum in 2001.

Civil War Soldier's Letter

Daniel W. Squier served in Company K of the 44th Indiana Volunteer Infantry

For further reading:

Brooks Johnson, *An Enduring Interest: the Photographs of Alexander Gardner* (Norfolk, Va.: The Chrysler Museum, 1991) is an illustrated catalog of a comprehensive exhibit of Gardner's work. All of Gardner's Lincoln photographs are reproduced in Charles Hamilton and Lloyd Ostendorf, *Lincoln in Photographs: An Album of Every Known Pose* (Dayton, Ohio: Morningside, 1985). For the influence of Sarah Fisher Ames and Matthew Wilson on Gardner's Lincoln poses, see Harold Holzer, "Lincoln From Life: As the Artists Saw Him," in *Lincoln Lore* 1855 (Winter 1999).

Gardner's Civil War photographs can be seen in *Gardner's Photographic Sketch Book of the Civil War* (1866), available in several modern editions. William A. Frassanito, *Gettysburg: A Journey in Time* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975) and *Antietam: The Photographic Legacy of America's Bloodiest Day* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1978) contain careful analyses of the battlefield photographs taken by Gardner and others. Among many other discoveries, Frassanito found that Gardner's images of casualties at Gettysburg (including the one reproduced in this article) were published with captions that misidentified the victims.

The Evening Star
Woman's World
WASHINGTON, D. C.,
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 1, 1972 SECTION C

White House Bids, Buys

By JO ANN LEWIS
Special to The Star

The White House managed to buy everything it wanted Sunday afternoon at Weschler's Auction Galleries, as the big, two-day catalogue sale of paintings, silver, porcelains, furniture and various other collectables swung into high gear.

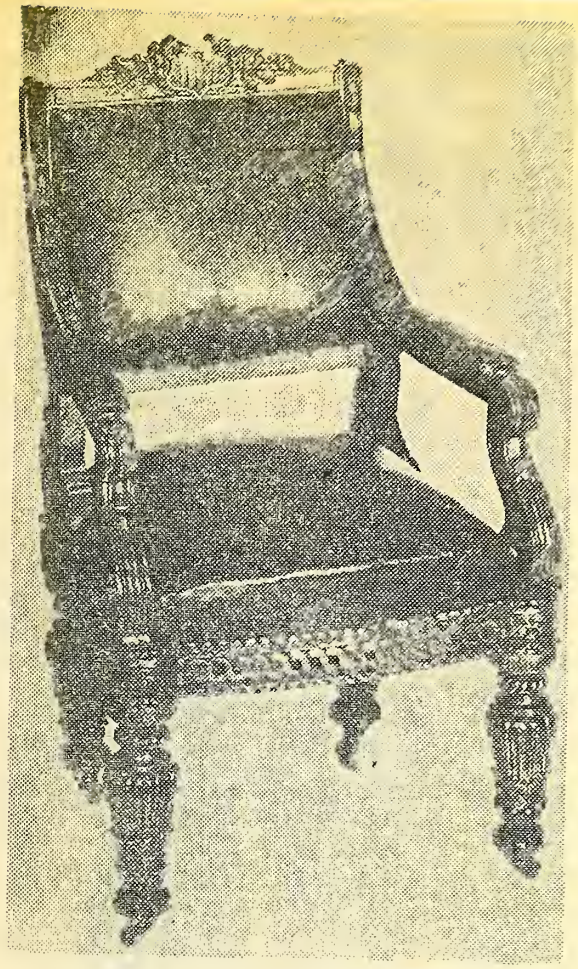
A big, black, rented limousine parked outside indicated that at least one rich out-of-town buyer was among the 400 dealers and collectors, decorators and diplomats, museum curators and just plain auction addicts who packed inside to either witness or participate in the bidding.

Lots of tailored mink was draped over metal chairs near the front where the big buyers sat, and there was a tremendous amount of milling about, most of it in the direction of the free coffee and roast beef sandwiches that kept people occupied until they could get into the bidding.

Two Weschler brothers took turns as auctioneers, and prices climbed in a jumble of sounds, while well-rehearsed sides, always on cue, brought things in, took them out, and scanned the audience for bids with radar-like eyes.

Seated discreetly to the rear, and unknown to the auctioneers and dealers present, a young White House staffer bid successfully on three items Clement Conger, the White House curator, had given her for a shopping list: a Tiffany silver three-handled cup presented by President McKinley to the Ambassador of France in 1898 ($1700); four plates from the President Polk China service ($2200) and a chair thought to have been used in

Continued on Page C-8



—Photo by J. H. Breger & Associates

This chair, bought by the White House at Sundoy's ouction, was originally given by Mrs. Abrohom Lincoln to Dr. Jocob R. Freese, a personal friend of the Lincolns. The Doe Hazleton Compony, Boston mode 262 such choirs for use in the United States Congress. One or more of these chairs wos removed to the White House during the Secession.

White House Bids, Buys

Continued From Page C-1

the White House during Lincoln's term of office ($1800).

"To have the McKinley cup turn up at auction here was a great stroke of luck—the kind of thing that happens once in 25 years," said Mr. Conger.

It is inscribed as follows: "Presented by the President of the United States to His Excellency M. Jules Cambon, Ambassador of France, in token of his friendly services in the negotiation of the Protocol of Peace between the United States and Spain. August 12, 1898."

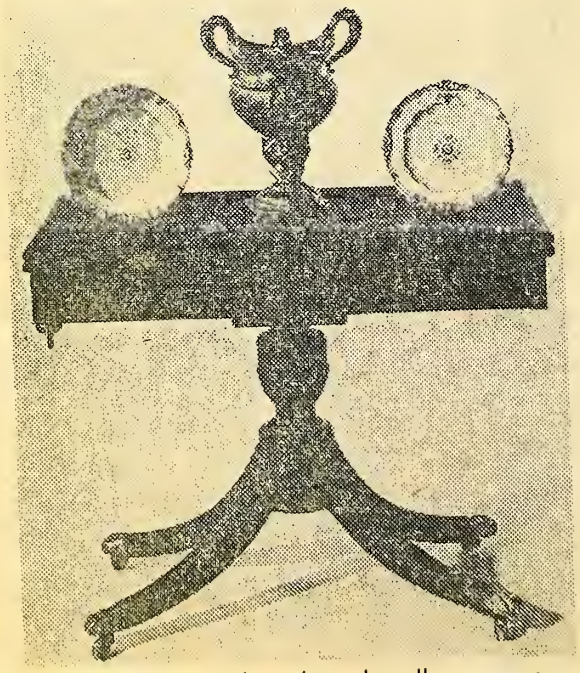
The Protocol of Peace was the document that ended the Spanish-American War, and it was signed in the present Treaty Room of the White House, where a painting of the event, M. Cambon included, is on display. The McKinley cup will become part of that room.

As for the Polk China, the White House owned only two pieces prior to this, insufficient for display. The group of six plates will go on view in the China Room.

A physician from Illinois was high bidder for the Simon de Vos painting of the Crucifixion, a 17th century work which was expected to and did bring the highest price in the auction—$16,000. This is the highest price ever paid for an European painting at auction in Washington. The record for an American painting is considerably higher—$52,000, paid last year at Weschler's for a portrait of Andrew Jackson by Samuel Lovett Waldo.

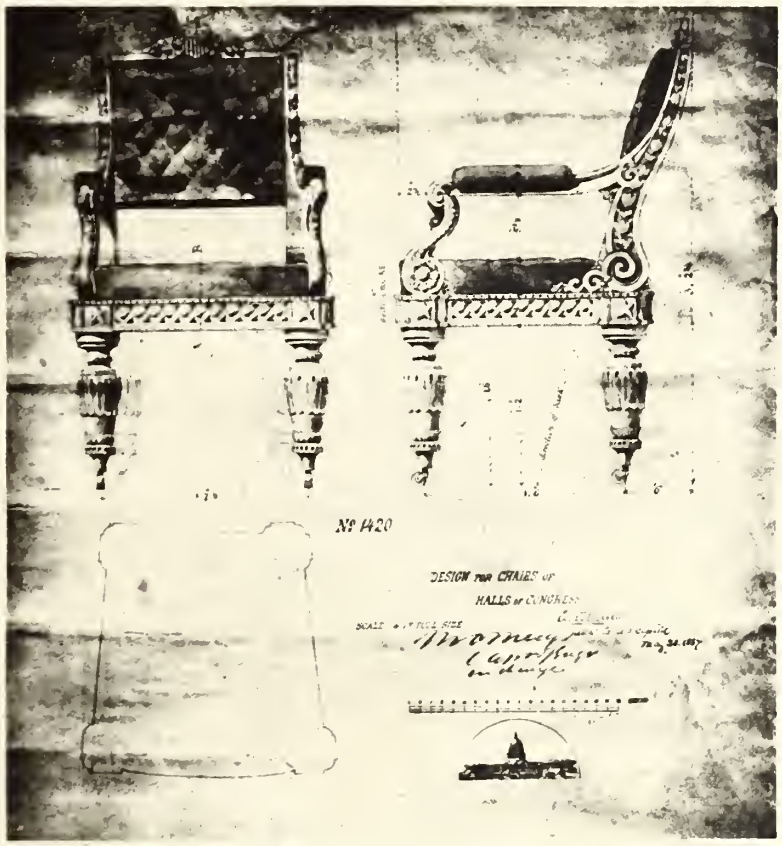
The biggest disappointment was the last-minute withdrawal of two of the most important paintings in the sale, a handsome pair of 18th century American portraits of two sisters by John Wollaston, which had been widely advertised and were expected to bring upwards of $20,000. On the eve of the auction, Weschler's was advised by court order that the paintings were involved in litigation by a previous owner, and therefore could not be sold.

The sale grossed $309,988 for 750 lots of merchandise. It was not a record, but everyone at Weschler's was very pleased the next morning, and so was Clement Conger at the White House.



The Tiffany silver three-handle cup was presented to Ambassador of France Jules Cambon by President McKinley around 1898. The cake plates with the motto "E Pluribus Unum" are from the service used for President Polk. All were bought by the White House.

In The L. M. U. Collection



Design for chairs of Halls of Congress, T. U. Walter, architect

CHAIRS FROM THE HALLS OF CONGRESS

The furnishings of the Lincoln Room are greatly enhanced by two beautiful oak chairs (now upholstered in red velvet), that were at one time used in the halls of Congress. These chairs were provided for the New House of Representatives when the legislative body moved out of the hall now used as Statuary Hall into its present quarters. These Congressional chairs were used with desks which were constructed to match the details of the design. Before long it was discovered that they occupied too much room and they were discarded and sold in the city of Washington.

The original plans for these Congressional chairs were drawn by T. U. Walter, architect, and his diagram is dated May 28, 1857. The chairs have been described as having a "profusely carved frame, the square back with pendants of laurel and oak leaves, crested by a United States shield with three stars, repeated upon the reverse, and flanked by laurel branches; the S-voluted arms supports enriched with imbrications and formal rosettes, the seat frame having a beaded guilloche band, with stars at the rounded corners. Massive tapering columnar legs carved with formal leafage and cupped in petal lappets, with fluted mushroom feet, castered.

Slip seat, back and armpads covered in olive green muslin."

Chairs like those in the Lincoln Room were oftentimes used by Washington photographers and many prominent statesmen in the National Capital, from the Lincoln administration through the McKinley administration, were photographed while seated in one of these chairs. While many refer to the Congressional chairs as the Matthew B. Brady chair, it is interesting to point out that some of Lincoln's best photographs taken while he was seated in a Congressional chair were made by Alexander Gardner.

So far as it can be determined sixteen of Lincoln's one hundred and twenty photographs depict the President seated in a Congressionial chair.

R. G. M.

THE FRONT COVER

The beardless portrait of Abraham Lincoln shown on the front cover is one of fourteen original Louis Bonhajo paintings now on display in the Lincoln Room. This oil painting was made from an original photograph of Lincoln probably made by S. M. Fassett in Chicago in October, 1859. The photographic study (Meserve No. 8) is regarded as a fine likeness and the oil portrait is one of the most pleasing studies of Lincoln ever executed by a modern artist.

The painting measures 14½"x17½" and is beautifully framed in walnut with an edging in gold which enhances its beauty. This portrait is a production of masterful technique and historical composition; the soft and delicate lines with a distinct brownish cast give this study a mellowness not usually associated with contemporary art.

The other thirteen Bonhajo paintings constitute a series of imaginative works, each depicting an important episode in Lincoln's life. This series of paintings has been described as being one of the most remarkable groups of idealized Lincoln portraits ever produced.

The acquisition of the fourteenth painting, the one shown on the front cover and the finest of the series, greatly enhances the beauty of the Lincoln Room, and the Bonhajo studies are an inspiration to students of art as well as those who delve into the dusty records of the past.

WHITE HOUSE GLASS

(*Continued from Page 34*)

Eight High Comportiers for fruit
Two do do large do do
Four Shell do
Two Bowls for Strawberries
Two Dessert Sugars
Two Round High Baskets for Fruit
Two Oval do do do do
Sixty Dessert Plate 8 inch
Thirty-six after Dinner Coffees

Eight Hundred and thirty seven dollars

Included in this statement was, "One fine breakfast, and Tea Service, containing five hundred and sixty pieces, richly decorated to match Dinner Service." These dishes were listed as follows:

Forty eight Tea Plates 6½ inch
Thirty six Preserve do 4½ do
Thirty six Coffees for Breakfast
Twenty four Egg Cups
Thirty six Teas
Eight Plates for Cake

Seven Hundred and fifty nine dollars

Other items included "Four Small Sevres (China) center pieces for "Bon Bons" at $100.00. "Two large center Pieces Sevres supported by White Pelicans" at $200.00 and "Two Punch Bowls" at $100.00. These articles were also decorated to match the dinner service. Further small purchases were made by Mrs. Lincoln from Houghwout & Co., including bedroom chinaware.

Fortunately for the national treasury, the Lincoln dishes were sufficient for the Johnson Administration, but when General Grant became President a period of elaborate entertaining began, and the largest dinner service that had ever been used in the White House was ordered from the Limoges kilns of the Haviland Company.

NOTE: In the writing and compiling of this article, the following sources of information have been consulted:

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Newton, Janet Foster: "Dorflinger Glass." *The Magazine Antiques*, January, 1944, pages 27-29.

Anderson, Mary F.: "Heirlooms In The White House" (Name and date of magazine unknown).

Baker, Abby Gunn: "White House China" (3 page mimeographed article).

Correspondence of Mrs. John R. Atkinson, 1150 Fifth Avenue, New York 28, N. Y. (Daughter of Christian Dorflinger).